

ray johnson

SEND LETTERS, POST CARDS,
DRAWINGS AND OBJECTS TO
MARCIA TUCKER, NEW YORK
CORRESPONDANCE SCHOOL
EXHIBITION, WHITNEY
MUSEUM, MADISON AVE.
AND 75 ST., N.Y.C. 10021

EVAPORATIONS BY RAY JOHNSON

**new york correspondance school
exhibition**

MAKE LOVE LETTERS NOT WAR.

MEET "DEAR RUTH"

WHOSE LOVE LETTERS SHOULD HAVE BEEN MAILED

IN ASBESTOS ENVELOPES . . . WHOSE SISTER GOT

HER ENGAGED TO FIVE MEN AT ONCE! BROADWAY

ROARED AT HER FOR 680 PERFORMANCES, CHICAGO

LAUGHED FOR 15 MONTHS, LOS ANGELES HUGGED HER

FOR 252 DAYS. NOW IT'S A WONDERFUL MOVIE AND

THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD CAN LOVE "RUTH", TOO.

MAKE LOVE LETTERS NOT WAR.

Ray Johnson

Drop a Line

When I met Ray Johnson in 1955, he took my address and mailed me some mimeographed sheets of cut-up phrases, mock letters, and epistolary manifestoes. When I wrote him a letter, it was returned promptly, torn up and pasted down. I was shocked and pleased at this small liberation from the conventional uses of the mails, and learned to see how his mailings called attention to the conventional processes of correspondence—envelopes, stamps, cancellations, complimentary closings—to make an unconventional point. His communications called attention to the charms and irritations of any communication, in which there are arbitrary restrictions, bourgeois interferences, and compromising self-stylizations, which limit communication even as they make it possible. Some distance is necessary for some closeness. Ray Johnson's friendships were mediated by the post office.

Everything Ray Johnson sent to me was a reference to something, a recapitulation, an illumination, and an increment. So he used *correspondence* (letter writing) as the style in which to convey a content of *correspondence* (correlation).

In the early 1960's, *correspondence* became *correspondance*, and the New York Correspondance School began in earnest. He spent hours every day mailing images to people, some labeled to be mailed to someone else. So a tissue of witty resemblances was enlarged, and a community emerged of correspondents who were willing to risk something to the mails, to send something freely to a stranger, to keep in touch by dropping a line.

This free exchange of information, images and junk parallels and parodies the commercial art market. Such an informal art exchange takes only a willingness to participate, some skill with a throw-away line, and the confidence to trust part of oneself to whisper through the immense impersonal system of the mails. The feelings accompanying this participation are like those in a play by Chekhov: the excitements of arrivals and departures, with little theatrical action, some disappointing surprises, much apparent inconsequence, and a feeling that perhaps nothing much more is possible nowadays anyway.

William S. Wilson

New York Correspondence School Contributors

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